

PIERRE BOURDIEU AND SOCIAL THEORY

CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES

Autumn 2009
SOCI 28036

Tu/Thu, 10:30 AM-12:00, SS 107
Office hours: TBA and by appointment @ Hallowed Grounds

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Over the past twenty years, French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has imposed himself as one of the major contemporary theorists in the social sciences. Although he confessed that he did not expect his theoretical system – which was produced in a specific intellectual and empirical context – to attain a large audience outside of France, a growing number of social scientists are currently engaging with his work. Because of its ambition and scope, Bourdieu's intellectual project has triggered a massive amount of discussion, interpretation and criticism. Starting from his analyses proves to be an interesting locus from which to explore key debates in the social sciences, from classic but still pertinent questions to contemporary issues.

This course aims to provide students with precise and non-dogmatic knowledge of Bourdieu's system in order to enable navigation of his work, but also to provide a better grasp of the main (and major) questions that run through classic & contemporary social theory. Albeit theoretical, this course will have a real emphasis on empirical research. First, Bourdieu's concepts will be presented along with the research they stem from, thus showing that they were less crafted for the sake of intellectual(ist) discussions than in order to solve practical problems left unexplained by theories of the time. Moreover, we will study them by putting them to work in order to assess the strengths and blind spots of Bourdieu's theoretical system.

In terms of organization, the course will be twofold. The first part will focus on the major theoretical strands Bourdieu drew on to build his system. It will thus begin with a thorough introduction to its main concepts, namely *habitus*, capital, field and symbolic power. These will be presented in the light of the different theories they are meant to supplement while largely drawing upon, mainly: (Levi Strauss') Structuralism, Phenomenology, Marxism, and Max Weber's social theory. The second part of the course will be more thematic, as we will investigate different subfields Bourdieu's work was influential for (including: consumption and cultural practices, education, urban sociology, gender) just as we will delve into some methodological and theoretical question on the basis of empirical cases.

Course organization, objectives, and grading policy

This class meets bi-weekly. It is open to everyone, although designed for upper-level students majoring in Sociology, Anthropology and Philosophy. Consider taking it if you have a strong motivation, a real interest in social theory and a good background in the main questions of the social sciences. At any rate, you should not take this course if you have not completed your core curriculum.

Each session will be made up of a) lecture and b) class discussion, so as to favor an active engagement with the texts. This class is an intense one, and most of the readings we will go through are dense and challenging. The syllabus has been planned to avoid unnecessary reading, so you cannot just pass your eyes onto them. Attention: the reading order matters: take the texts in order. In case you're in a rush (or slightly confused), another level of text selection has been made (for instance, *Distinction*, pp. 121-152 [esp. 121-141]).

Your final grade will be determined on the following basis:

1. Participation (10%): Since one of the primary objectives of the class is to make you able to think with the concepts and within the theoretical frames we read about, active participation is expected.
2. Text commentaries (50%): In order to ensure a real, in depth engagement with the texts, you will have to turn in two short text commentaries (3-4 pages). Focusing on a piece of text most likely unknown to you (25-40 lines), you will have to thoroughly restate its argument and internal logic. Lectures, readings and class discussions will provide you with extra knowledge to adequately frame the problem at stake. In order to limit your workload at home, the first one will be a take-home paper, but the second will take place in class.

Text commentary 1	25%	3/4 pages	due Oct , 20 th
Text commentary 2	25%	“all you can write”	in class on Nov , 10 th

3. Take Home Paper (40%): You will also have one long take-home paper, due at the end of the quarter. This will be an argumentative piece answering a precise topic, not just a restatement of thesis. It will necessarily be composed of an introduction that includes a presentation of the question, a quick discussion of it, and a main thesis. Each ensuing paragraph, logically tied to the previous one, will include both an argument and an example to sustain your claim. A conclusion will summarize the main stages of the demonstration, provide precise answers to the sub-questions and, if any, provide new queries from the new standpoint you reached (Average length: 8-12 well-written, well-argued pages)

Final paper	40%	8-12 pages	due Dec, 9 th
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Course material and information

- A website has been created for the course, with extra-resources, useful links, and a weekly updated outline of the class. Check it out from time to time, at <http://ollion.net/courses/PBST09>.
- Most of the material is available either on the dedicated website for the class, or on e-reserve (* = e-reserve; web = website).
- The books and articles necessary for the course have been placed on reserve at the Joseph Regenstein library: ask for them at the 1st floor reserve desk.
- The following books have been ordered for you at the Seminary Coop bookstore (Y = required; - = recommended).
 - ✓ Bourdieu (1990, [1980]), *The Logic of Practice*, Stanford, Stanford University Press.
 - ✓ Bourdieu (1984, [1979]), *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
 - Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), *An Invitation to a Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (Not necessary, but useful).



1. Introduction: Locating Bourdieu

The first week aims to provide a broad outline of Bourdieu's work and theoretical background. After a short presentation of his personal and intellectual trajectory, we will assess his current importance in contemporary social sciences. This will lead us to situate him with respect to structuralism, an early and important source of influence for his work.

(i) *Introducing Bourdieu: an Overview*

(ii) *The Structuralist Origins of Pierre Bourdieu*

- C. Lévi-Strauss, "Structural Analysis in Linguistics and in Anthropology," *Structural Anthropology I*, New York, Basic Books, 1963 [1948], pp. 31-54 (*).
- P. Bourdieu, "The Kabyle House or the World Reversed" [1969] in *The Logic of Practice*, 1990 [1980] pp. 271-283.

For further reading

- Jeffrey J. Sallaz, Jane Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology, 1980-2004," in *Annual Review of Sociology*, 2007, 33 (21), pp. 21-41 (web).
- L. Wacquant, "Pierre Bourdieu," in Rob Stone (ed.) *Key Sociological Thinkers*, 2006, London: MacMillan, pp. 261-277 (web).
- J. Culler, "Structuralism", in *The Columbia History of Twentieth-Century French Thought*, edited by L. Kritzman, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 110-117 (*).
- "Structuralism and the Theory of Social Knowledge," in *Social Research*, 35 (4), 1968, pp. 681-706 (*).

2. From Structuralism to Genetic Structuralism: Introducing *habitus*

This week's reading will show how Bourdieu, rejecting what he termed the "objectivism" of structuralism (Lévi-Strauss), conceived of and introduced his notion of *habitus*. We will look at how, in order to account for individuals' actual practices, (i) he criticized structural anthropology a. for its "intellectualist" standpoint and b. for focusing on the rules instead of on the way individuals deal with these rules; and (ii) how he drew on phenomenology in an attempt to sidestep the opposition between conscious and non-conscious actions (*practical sense*). We will have the idea of *habitus* as 'incorporated, durable, transposable dispositions' illustrated with M. Desmond's ethnography of firefighters.

(i) *A Criticism of Structuralism*

- "From Rules to Strategies", *In Other Words*, [1990] p. 59-75 (*).
- "Objectification objectified", "Belief and the Body", in *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 30-42 and 66-80.
- "The Calendar and the Synoptic Illusion," insert in "Irresistible analogy", *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 203- 209.

(ii) *Habitus, Practical Sense and the Theory of Action*

- "Structure, *habitus*, practices", *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 52-65
- M. Desmond, "Becoming a Firefighter", *Ethnography*, 2006, 7 (4), 387-421 (web).

For further reading

- "The Imaginary Anthropology of Subjectivism", and "The Logic of Practice", in *The Logic of Practice*, pp. 42-52 and pp. 80-98.
- "Bodily Knowledge", *Pascalian Meditations*, pp. 128-163 (*).

3. Pluralizing Capital: Bourdieu's Debts and Distances to Marx

Against the dominant vision (esp. in the US) of Bourdieu as a Marxist, his analysis of capital tends to show his distance from Marx. He nonetheless retains several key traits of the Marxist analysis: an agonistic conception of the social world, and the role of capital(s) in determining practices. (i) Pluralizing capital (at first by introducing cultural capital) helped him to account for the *reproduction of the social structure* he perceived in the rapidly changing French society of the 1960s and 1970s. (ii) From there, we will have a first taste of *Distinction*, approached from the social organizational side: following up on our discussions of cultural capital, we will investigate how Bourdieu used it to provide a more complex, *multidimensional* depiction of the social world.

(i) *The Role of Cultural Capital in Reproduction*

- Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, "Selecting the Elect" and "Conclusion" in *The Inheritors*. [1979, 1964], pp. 1-27 and 67-76 (web)

(ii) *Mapping the Social Space, Reassessing value*

- "The New Capital", *Practical Reason*, Stanford U. Press, 1998 [1994], pp. 19-31 (*).
- "Social Space and its Transformations", *Distinction*, pp. 99-167.

For further reading

- L. Wacquant, "Notes on Bourdieu's capital", *Foreword to the State Nobility* (1997 [1989]). (*)
- "The forms of capital", in J.G. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, 1986, New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258 (*).

4. Marx Meets Weber: the Logic of Fields

Meshing together a relational take on social practices (structuralism), a power dimension (fields are sites of struggles over the possession of the specific capital), and the roles played by agents endowed with a different volume of capital (the weberian "skills"), the concept of field is a complex albeit important one in Bourdieu's sociology. Describing rather autonomous spaces into which individuals try to impose themselves along with their views, the notion of field supplements the concept of capital by depicting the site into which the latter takes its value. In other words, if *Distinction* provided us with a broad map of the social space as a whole, the notion of field is meant to offer a close-up view of certain areas thereof.

(i) Given that **the first text commentary is due on Tuesday**, the reading load for the first session is limited – please allow the time to look through all the 12 pages though, they will help you during the lecture when we're trying to construct a field. (ii) Located in time and space and consequently unique, fields have nonetheless certain properties we'll try to extract from Bourdieu's study of the French academic world at the eve of the 1968 revolt.

First paper due by Tuesday, October 20th in class

(i) *Some Properties of the Fields*

- "Some Properties of the Fields," and "Haute Couture, Haute Culture," in *Sociology in Questions*, Sage, 1994 [1984], pp. 72-77 and pp. 132-138 (*).

(ii) *Meshing field and habitus: towards Bourdieu's Theory of Action*

- "The Conflict of the Faculties" and "Types of Capital and Forms of Power" in *Homo Academicus*, Stanford University Press, 1988 [1984], pp. 36-128 [esp. pp. 36 – 69 and pp. 112-118 and pp. 125- 127].

- “The Logic of Fields”, in *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 94-114 (*).

For further reading

- “Genesis and Structure of the Religious Field,” *Comparative Social Research*, Vol. 13, 1991, pp. 1-44.
- R. Benson and E. Neveu, “Field Theory as a work in Progress,” in *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, Polity, 2004, pp. 1-27.
- J. L. Martin, “What is Field Theory?” *American Journal of Sociology*, 2003, 109 (July 2003), pp. 1-49.
- M. Schudson, “Autonomy from What?”, in *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field*, Polity, 2004, pp. 214-223.

5. Fields and Power: Towards a General Economy of Practices

Albeit quite complex, the notion of field is key to Bourdieu’s sociology. We will investigate it in greater detail this week. (i) Against the reduction of action to economic determinants, his model insists on the differentiated values that are present in the social world, and provides a way to bridge the long-held distinction between the material and the symbolic. It then introduces Bourdieu’s general economy of practices. (ii) From there, we’ll conclude this first part of the course by the last important bourdieusian concept of symbolic power. Bourdieu’s work was often called a sociology of power (or a sociology of domination), especially outside of France. A consequence of the central importance granted to the permanent struggles taking place in the social world (*cf.* fields), he built a theory of power, an invitation to capture the role played by *symbolic violence*. This week will aim to present the main arguments of Bourdieu’s analysis on this topic, which we will illustrate by different examples.

(i) Material and Symbolic: Toward a General Economy of Practices

- “The Field of Cultural Production, or the Economic World Reversed,” *The Field of Cultural Production*, pp. 29-73 (*).

(ii) Symbolic Power: How to Create Worlds with Words

- « The Production and Reproduction of Legitimate Language », in *Language and Symbolic Power*, 1999, pp. 43-66 (*).

For further reading

- “On Symbolic Power”, *Language and Symbolic Power*, 1999, pp. 163-170 (*)
- “The Economy of Symbolic Goods”, *Practical Reasons*, pp. 92-127.

6. Distinction and its Discontents: on Culture and Tastes

In *Distinction*, Bourdieu undertook the heavy task of explaining the formation and transformation of people’s tastes. (i) Consistent with his previous analyses, he attempted to explain what appeared as necessarily individual by linking it to the position of the agent in the social space, and to his trajectory. Probably Bourdieu’s most famous book (for what this is worth, it was ranked 6th book of the century by the International Sociological Association), it is probably also the most controversial. This week aims at presenting precisely *Distinction*’s main thesis. (ii) We will then study some of the most frequent criticisms that were made of the book in order to disentangle the different arguments. We will then have a look at B. Lahire’s research program on dispositions.

(i) A Social Explanation of Tastes (from modern art to your everyday food)

- “Introduction” and “A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste”. In *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (1984 [1979]), pp. 1-97.

(ii) *What's class' got to do with it? (Snobs, Omnivores, etc.)*

- B. Lahire, "From the habitus to an individual heritage of dispositions. Toward a Sociology at the Level of the Individuals", *Poetics*, 31, 2003, pp. 329-355 (web).

For further reading

- B. Lahire, "The Individual and the Mixing of Genres: Cultural Dissonance and Self Distinction", forthcoming in *Poetics*, February 2008 (web).
- Ph. Coulangeon and Y. Lemel, "Is 'Distinction' Really Outdated? Questioning the Meaning of Omnivorization of Musical Taste in Contemporary France", *Poetics*, 35, 2007, pp. 93-111 (web).
- R.A. Peterson and A. Simkus, "How Musical Tastes Mark Occupational Status Group", in M. Lamont and M. Fournier, *Cultivating Differences. Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, pp. 152-186 (*).
- Terry Nichols Clark and Ronald Inglehart, "The New Political Culture: Changing Dynamics of Support for the Welfare State and Other Policies in Postindustrial Societies", in T.N. Clark and V. Hoffman-Martinot (eds), *The New Political Culture*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998, p. 9-72 (*).

7. In B.Ed. with Pierre Bourdieuⁱ

This week will take us to boarding schools and educational facilities with Bourdieu, in at least two different ways. **The first session will be devoted to the second, in-class exam (i)**. Although there are no required readings (but for everything we've said and read so far), a few short texts are indicated in order to help those of you who fear anomy. The second session (ii) will illustrate how some of Bourdieu's insights and concepts can be usefully deployed to study education in another context than 1960s France – thus offering some insights on the US context, and a way to assess the relevance and strength of the notion.

(i) Second text commentary (In-Class)

- "The space of points of view" and "Understanding" in *The Weight of the World*, pp. 3-5 and 607-626 (*).
- "The Twofold Truth of the Gift", in *Pascalian Meditations*, 2000 [1997], pp. 191-202 (*).

(ii) *Dissecting school routines*

- E. Weininger & A. Lareau, "Translating Bourdieu into the American Context: the Question of Social Class and Family-School Relation" in *Poetics*, 31, 2003, pp. 375-402 (web).

For Further Reading

- R. Cookson and C. Persell "Chartering and Bartering: Elite Education and Social Reproduction", *Social Problems*, 33 (2), 1985, pp. 114-129 (web).
- A. Lareau, "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families," *American Sociological Review*, 67 (October): 747-776. 2002.
- J. Karabel, "The Battle over Merit," in *The Chosen. History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale and Princeton*, 2005, pp. 536-557 (*).

8. How to Make (Theoretical) Things with Groups?

In the line of the criticisms of Bourdieu's main categories of analysis (week 6), we will continue to investigate these debates. (i) We will first consider two alternative systems, both partly elaborated against Bourdieu's theories: Latour's just as Boltanski's self-defined "pragmatic sociologies" (look out, they are nonetheless different!) depart from Bourdieu in their attempts to depict society without the oft-used

“social properties” and group-belonging as variables for the analysis. More detailed attention will be given to Latour’s Actor Network Theory. The readings of the second week will try to clarify this heated debate by investigating Bourdieu’s approach to groups (how they are constituted, how they solidify, and how they disappear), and his constant call and method for identifying (rather than postulating) entities.

(i) *Doing Away with Classical Tools: on Group Formation*

- L. Boltanski and L. Thévenot, “Preface: How we wrote this Book”, *On Justification*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 1-12 (*).
- B. Latour, “First Source of Uncertainty: no Group, Only Group Formation”, in *Reassembling the Social. An Introduction to Actor Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005, pp. 27-42 (*).

(ii) *Identifying the Systems of Division and their Products*

- “‘Youth’ is just a word”, *Sociology in Questions*, pp. 94-102 (*).
- R. Brubaker, “Ethnicity without Groups”, *Ethnicity without Groups*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 7-27 (*).

For Further Reading

- “Social Space and the theory of ‘classes’,” *Theory and Society*, 14, 1985 [1984], pp. 229-251 (*)
- “What Makes a Social Class: on the Theoretical and Practical Existence of Groups,” in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, XXXII, 1987, pp. 1-17.

9. Studying Intellectuals and their Productions: an Introduction to the Sociology of Ideas

Following up some of Bourdieu’s concepts (chiefly field) as well as on empirical studies he conducted (*Homo Academicus*, *the Political Ontology of Martin Heidegger*, *the Rules of Art*), many students of the intellectual world drew on, or conversely opposed, Bourdieu’s depiction of these social milieus. This week’s sessions will provide us with an introduction to the “ABC of the new sociology of ideas”: Abbott, Bourdieu and Collins (Camic). After a brief outline of the history and current debates within the subfield, we will study different ways of accounting for the emergence of ideas against Bourdieu’s approach: Collins’ interaction chain (on philosophy schools) and Abbott’s contextual analysis (on disciplines). This will lead us to assess and to consider alternative models to structural field analyzes.

(i) *On the Emergence of Ideas*

- S. Frickel and N. Gross. (2005). “A General Theory of Scientific / Intellectual Movements,” *American Sociological Review*, 70: 204-232 (web).
- R. Collins, “Toward a Theory of Intellectual Change: The Social Causes of Philosophies,” *Science, Technology and Human Values*, 14 (2), 1989, pp. 107-140 (web).

(ii) *Ecological and Structural Fields*

- A. Abbott, “The Context of Disciplines,” in *Chaos of Disciplines*, pp. 122-153 [esp. part 3 and 4] (*)
- A. Abbott, “Ecologies and Fields,” unpublished text in which Abbott specifies his relation to Bourdieu (on intellectual grounds only), pp. 1-7 (web).

For Further Reading

- “What is the New Sociology of Ideas?”, an interview with Neil Gross and Charles Camic, Transeo, 2008, <http://www.transeo-review.eu/What-is-the-new-sociology-of-Ideas.html?lang=en>
- *The Political Ontology of Heidegger* (chapters 1, 2 & 3).

10. (Re)-Engendering Bourdieu

Due to reading period, the class will only meet once this week. We will try to recapitulate some of the main thesis and ideas we read about during the quarter. Through a brief investigation of the questions of gender, we will try to engage actively and critically with his theory through the prism of this issue.

(i) *Doing and undoing gender*

- “A Magnified Image” in *Masculine Domination*, Stanford University Press, 2001 ([1998]), pp. 5-52 (web).
- Terri Lovell, “Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu”, *Feminist Theory*, 1 (1), 2000, pp. 11-32.

(ii) *Reading Period: no class.*

For further reading

- *Masculine Domination*, entire.
- C. West and D. Zimmerman, “Doing Gender”, *Gender and Society*, 1 (2) 1987, pp. 125-151 (web).
- T. Moi, “Appropriating Bourdieu: Feminist Theory and Pierre Bourdieu’s Sociology of Culture », in *New Literary History*, 22 (4), 1991, pp. 1017-1049 (*).
- L. McCall, “Does Gender Fit? Bourdieu, Feminism, and the Conceptions of Social Order”, *Theory and Society*, 21 (6), 1992, pp. 837-867 (*).

Final paper due by Wednesday, Dec 9th @ 12 noon in my mailbox (SS 306)
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ⁱ Madonna was not available